

Preface

Equality of educational opportunity is an extraordinarily difficult objective to achieve. One reason this is so is the critical problem of definition. What constitutes such equality? How do you know when you have achieved it?

As social scientists and educators we have not arrived at any final answers to these questions. We have, however, adopted a strategy that we feel is useful in moving toward an answer. That strategy is systematically to define what equality is **not**—in other words, to focus upon inequality. The effort here is to employ the research tools at our disposal to hack away at the protective briars and tangled growth that camouflage those educational practices that we suspect reasonable men, once knowing of them, would agree are unequal. If successful, we are free to move to another thicket and expose another inequity. Such practices may never lead to an ideal definition of “equality,” but we hope that they may serve to eliminate or significantly reduce a number of the most glaring inequalities.

One purpose of this book is to expose the inequalities that presently surround the manner in which school resources are distributed. We contend that under present circumstances the general tendency is for children from wealthy homes to have high-quality educational services available to them, whereas their peers from less fortunate circumstances have access only to low-quality educational services. This then is the problem to which we invite the attention of thoughtful men. We hope that they will concur that such a situation is contrary to most any definition of “equality of educational opportunity.”

The second purpose of this book is to serve as an example of useful social science research for those individuals who presently are seeking legislative and judicial remedies for educational inequalities. The mid-1960s marked the beginning of a significant increase in the level of attention devoted to equality of educational opportunity. It was during this period that Congress enacted the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Economic Opportunity Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This legislation appeared to have great significance for educational reform, but progress was not quick in coming.

Subsequently, a number of authors began to argue that the courts also offered an avenue by which inequities could be alleviated.¹

¹ The two best examples of such works are Arthur E. Wise, *Rich Schools: Poor Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) and John E. Coons, William H. Clune, and Stephen D. Sugarman, *Private Wealth and Public Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

These writers contend that present-day school finance inequalities can be construed to be in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

We believe that this argument possesses a great deal of merit, it may be that the courts will be persuaded to act on the matter, or it may be that the logic of the interpretation will nevertheless be effective in convincing state legislatures themselves of the need to act. In any event, it is our position that the specific arguments made to courts and legislative bodies should embody research of the type illustrated by this book. Our efforts no doubt can be improved upon, but we hope, nevertheless, that they may serve as a model that will enable reformers to span the gap between legal theory and the practicalities of educational change.

A third purpose of this book is also tied to the task of defining equality of educational opportunity. Numerous past studies have framed such a definition in terms of parity of dollar expenditures. If different states, different school districts, and different schools are spending different amounts per pupil, then it is held that opportunities gaps exist that should be rectified. Most such reform efforts have been well intentioned, but their results have been less than decisive. Evidence suggests that expenditure disparities persist in every state, and in some states the discrepancy between the highest-spending and lowest-spending districts is in excess of 300 percent.

One factor that perhaps accounts for the failure of these reform movements has been their inability to demonstrate that equal dollars are indeed tied to "equality of opportunity." Even to an unsophisticated layman, it is obvious that the relationship between dollars spent and how much students learn is neither clear nor constant. Under such murky conditions of cause and effect, why should anyone become very disturbed? Is it not possible that a child who is genuinely motivated can compensate for the lack of science laboratories, new books, and computer-assisted instructional programs? The "little red schoolhouse" previously produced results, and it did not cost \$1,500 a year per pupil to run. Why then should we worry about the fact that today not every child has the same amount spent for his schooling? In other words, if reformers are to be concerned about equality of opportunity through the schools, then they must begin to explore systematically the patterns of resource dispersal in the schools and how these patterns affect children's education.

This book is a preliminary effort in that direction. A conceptual

chain has been set up that links (1) the level of financial input to (2) the quality of services delivered to (3) the level of student achievement to (4) the postschool performance of pupils. Available evidence has been amassed in support of each hypothesized link in this chain. We are far from convinced that we have constructed the perfect conceptual chain or equipped it with all the correct evidentiary links, let alone logically soldered the links tightly shut. We hope that our successors can improve on our efforts at every step of the way. Nevertheless, we do hope that the formulation of the problem in this fashion may be helpful in reaching conclusions as to what should be done to eliminate present disparities and thereby bring us close to the goal of equal educational opportunity.

In pursuing the purposes just described, we were joined by the National Urban Coalition. In addition to its overall concern for solving the problems of our cities, that organization was specifically interested in supporting an objective study relevant to a Michigan court case of national significance for education. The Board of Education of the School District of the City of Detroit had filed a complaint alleging that Michigan's governmental arrangements for education violated both the state constitution and the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment. The litigation necessitated a high degree of information and analysis regarding the character of school services in the state. Given this concurrence of interests, we accepted the National Urban Coalition's offer of assistance to conduct a study of schools and inequality.

Yet another overlap was our desire to study the state with the most adequate supply of data about its educational system. The year prior to our study, Michigan had completed a remarkably thorough examination of its educational system. In addition, a substantial number of the state's schools and students had been tapped for the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey conducted in 1965 by the U.S. Office of Education. Consequently, it appeared as if a study in Michigan, more than any other state, would suffice to meet the many prerequisites for an assessment of schools and their consequences.

Our efforts in conducting the study were aided by literally hundreds of individuals. We are particularly grateful to James A. Kelly, Associate Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University, formerly an Executive Associate at The National Urban Coalition, for his many contributions in facilitating this study. Without his perspective and persistence there would not have been such a study. Similarly, we

are appreciative of the encouragement and support of The National Urban Coalition and its former Chairman, John W. Gardner.

In attempting to conceptualize the study and arrive at suitable research procedures we were assisted by a number of notable educators and scholars. H. Thomas James, President of the Lyle M. Spencer Foundation, Arthur P. Coladarci, Acting Dean of the Stanford University School of Education, Dean Alan K. Campbell and Professor Jesse Burkhead of the Maxwell Graduate School, Syracuse University, J. Alan Thomas, Dean, and Arthur E. Wise, Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Chicago, and Charles S. Benson, Professor, Guy Benveniste, Associate Professor, and Rodney J. Reed, Assistant Professor, Division of Policy Planning and Administration, School of Education, University of California at Berkeley, were all instrumental in this respect.

In addition to these individuals, a number of professional colleagues contributed directly to the content of the report. Jack W. Osman, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, San Francisco State College, provided a general description of state school finance arrangements and a specific analysis of Michigan school aid formulas. Denny Stavros of the Research Division in the Detroit schools helped by increasing our understanding of the relationship between student socioeconomic status and availability of informal educational opportunities. A working paper on school programs designed to increase the educational achievement of low socioeconomic status students was prepared by William D. Rohwer, Professor, School of Education, University of California at Berkeley. Stephen Michaelson, Assistant Professor, School of Education, Harvard University, provided valuable assistance in analyzing data from the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey. Forest Harrison, formerly a Research Associate in the Division of Policy Planning and Administration in the School of Education, University of California at Berkeley, now an Assistant Professor at the Claremont Graduate School, and Michael Woodroffe and Norman Starr at the University of Michigan provided advice about statistical procedures. Computer programming and other tasks connected with electronic data processing were provided by Charles E. Hansen, Girard C. Pessis, Stephen Rhoads, and Marvin Tener.

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In their own fashion, each of the foregoing individuals established high standards of quality to be met by this study, and each contributed his or her utmost to enable us to meet those standards.

J. W. G.

G. B. K.

H. M. L.

R. T. S.

Berkeley, Stanford, and
Claremont, California